



Federal Assessment and Accountability Overview

Alaska Task Force on Education Funding

April 15, 2026

Austin Reid, Federal Affairs Advisor, NCSL

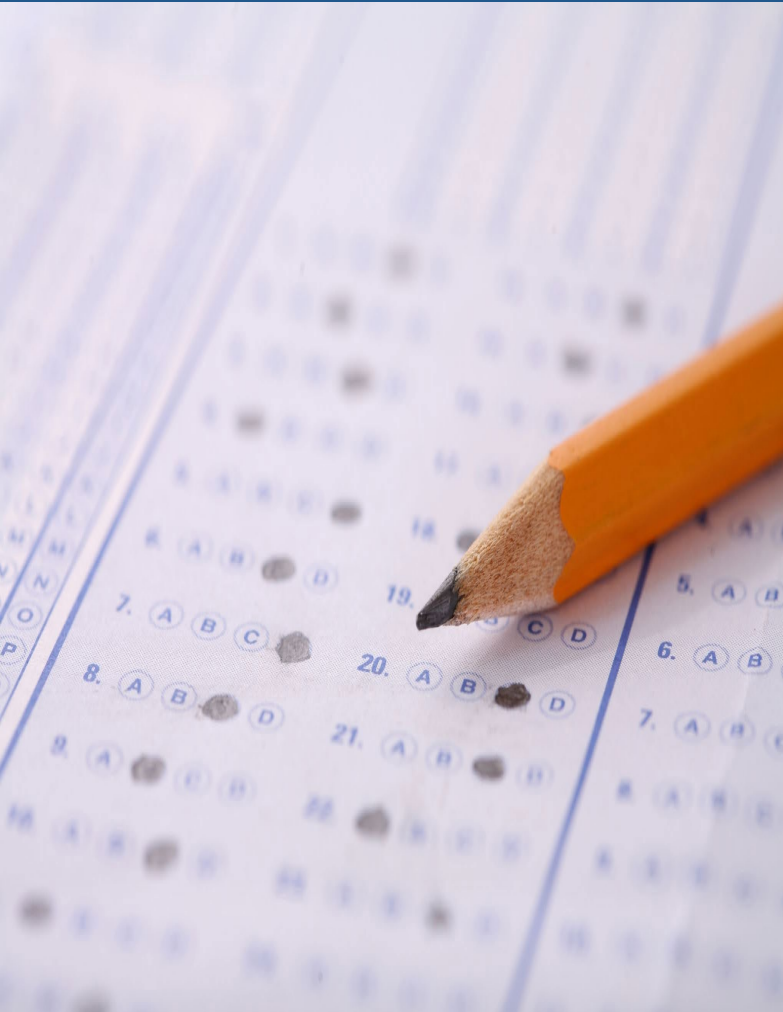


Agenda

- Assessment
- Accountability
- School improvement
- State plans
- Existing flexibilities



Assessments



- States must assess math, ELA, and science across grade levels
 - Math and ELA: Each year in grades 3-8; at least once in grades 9-12
 - Science: At least once each in grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12
- In total, states must administer 17 assessments each year, but no student will take more than 3 federally-required assessments in a school year
- States choose their own assessments, they must be high quality and be aligned to state standards
- Alternative assessments are allowed for students with the most significant disabilities, only up to 1% of all students for each subject
- At least 95% of all students and subgroups of students must take these assessments
- LEAs must administer annual English proficiency assessment for all English learners aligned with state English language proficiency standards

State Accountability Systems

- Federal requirements for state accountability systems are meant to ensure states can provide meaningful annual differentiation between schools and to identify schools for improvement
- States must establish long-term goals for all students and all subgroups of students, measured by 5 indicators
 - **Goals** must be based on challenging state academic standards for math, ELA, and science
 - **Standards** are determined by states and must apply to all public school students, only exception allows alternate standards for students with most significant cognitive disabilities
 - **Subgroups** required: Economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, English learners
 - States must choose minimum number of students (n-size) for meaningful disaggregation that is statistically sound and doesn't comprise student privacy

State Accountability Systems

- Requires states to use 4-5 indicators:
 1. **Academic achievement** measured by proficiency in annual assessments. States can choose to include student growth for high schools
 2. **Student growth** or another valid and reliable academic indicator for elementary and middle schools
 3. **Four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate** for high schools
 4. **Progress on achieving English language proficiency** for English language learners
 5. **School quality or student success**, at least one indicator
 - E.g. Chronic absenteeism, suspension rate, science achievement, school climate survey, college and career readiness, early literacy
- States have flexibility to choose specific measurements for some indicators, states choose weights of indicators
- The four academic indicators must have greater weight than the indicator of school quality and student success

School Improvement: Federal Categories

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT (CSI)

- Lowest performing 5% of all Title I schools
- All high schools with at least 1/3 of students not graduating
- Schools that have been identified for ATSI for a state-determined number of years

TARGETED SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT (TSI)

- Any school where any subgroup of students is consistently underperforming
- State determines definition of “consistently underperforming”

ADDITIONAL TARGETED SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT (ATSI)

- Any school where any subgroup of students on its own would be in the lowest performing 5% of all Title I schools

States may create additional categories for school improvement beyond ESSA requirements. As of 2022, at least 39 states did so.

School Improvement

Actions

- CSI: LEAs work with stakeholders to create school improvement plan, must be based on school needs assessment, include evidence-based interventions (four tiers of evidence), identify resource inequities. LEA may allow students to transfer to another school within the LEA
- TSI: Schools required to develop and implement improvement plan that includes evidence-based interventions
- ATSI: Must identify resource inequities

Exit criteria

- States must determine exit criteria for CSI and ATSI schools, not required for TSI schools
- CSI schools that don't meet exit criteria in 4 years must face more rigorous state action than previous interventions
- State determines number of years ATSI schools have to meet exit criteria before being identified for CSI

Funding

- States must use 7% of Title I funding for school improvement activities, 95% of which must be granted to LEAs to serve CSI, TSI, ATSI schools
- Grants to LEAs can be categorical or competitive; for up to 4 years, including a planning year
- States may reserve 3% of Title I funding to grant to LEAs for direct student services (e.g. tutoring, college and career prep coursework) for CSI and TSI schools

State Plans: Contents

- Explain specifics of how states will set up and meet federal requirements related to assessments, accountability systems, and school improvement
- State plans must also describe how the state will:
 - Provide assistance to LEAs and individual elementary schools to **support early childhood education programs**
 - Ensure low-income and minority students are not served at disproportionate rates by **ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers** and how SEA will evaluate and report progress on this
 - Support **improving school conditions for learning**, including reducing bullying and harassment, overuse of exclusionary discipline, use of adverse behavioral interventions that compromise student health and safety
 - Support LEAs in meeting needs at all levels of schooling, including middle and high school to **decrease risk of dropping out**
 - Work with state child welfare agency to ensure **educational stability for children in foster care**
 - Support LEAs in identifying and supporting **homeless students**

State Plans: Process



- **Initial Plan Submission (2017)**

- Must include “timely and meaningful consultation” with state legislature, governor, and other state and local education entities
- Must have 30-day public comment period before submission to ED
- Plans undergo peer review once submitted
- State plans, peer review guidance and notes, and approvals or disapprovals by the Secretary must be publicly available

- **Amendments**

- States may amend their plans at any time if making substantive changes to the existing state plan
- Does not require peer review process, Secretary must approve or disapprove within 90 days of submission
- Does not require state legislature consultation, but ED recommends consultation with governor and other state and local entities

Existing Flexibilities Under ESSA

- **Amendments to state plans**
 - Allows states to take advantage of inherent flexibilities for states in the law
- **Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA)**
 - Allows states to pilot new types of assessments and scale them up to be used statewide
 - E.g. competency-based assessments, interim assessments, and assessments that demonstrate mastery to support differentiated learning
 - Does not come with additional funding, but states may use part of their funding through the State Assessment Grant program
- **Waivers**
 - ESSA gives the Secretary waiver authority, with certain limitations
 - E.g.: Waiver use was prevalent during COVID, ED invited states to apply for waivers on assessment and accountability provisions, all states received waivers

Waiver Process Under ESSA

Process

- Only SEAs can submit waiver requests, though they may submit requests on behalf of LEAs
- SEAs must seek public comment on waiver requests
- Waivers must be publicly posted online
- Once submitted, ED has 120 days to respond
 - May approve, deny, or ask a state to revise and resubmit
- Current administration interested in working with states to develop waiver requests and ensure requests can be approved
 - Secretary has authority to waive assessment and accountability provisions, current administration hasn't signaled an interest in deviating from statutory requirements

Limitations

- 10 key provisions of ESSA that may not be waived, including:
 - Allocation or distribution of funds to states, districts, tribes, or other grantees
 - Procedure districts use to determine which schools receive Title I funding
 - Civil rights requirements of other applicable laws
- Secretary can't reject waivers based on issues not included in waiver request
- Secretary can't require states to include or not include specific standards, assessments, elements of accountability systems, or educator evaluation systems